

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 IO-13
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TRSE-00 OMB-01 /098 W
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R 160940Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3519
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
SECDEF WASHDC
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR
USIA WASHDC

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: SOPN, MOPS, SY, IS, XF
SUBJECT: SYRIAN PRESS ANALYZES THE WAR OPTION

1. SUMMARY: WHILE PRES. ASSAD'S LATEST PUBLIC STATEMENTS
HAVE CAREFULLY AVOIDED ANY REFERENCE TO POSSIBLE EVENTUAL
RESUMPTION OF HOSTILITIES, SYRIAN COLUMNISTS OVER PAST TEN
DAYS HAVE ANALYZED WAR OPTION WHILE CONTINUING TO PROFESS
SYRIAN DESIRE TO REACH SETTLEMENT WITH ISRAEL BY POLITICAL
MEANS. THEY CASTIGATE ISRAEL AS RESPONSIBLE FOR REEMERGENCE
OF WAR DANGER. THEY BELIEVE THREAT OF WAR HEIGHTENS SENSE
OF COMMON DANGER SHARED BY CONFRONTATION AND OIL-PRODUCING
STATES. IN GENERAL, THEY STILL SEE MUTUAL U.S.-ARAB DESIRE
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FOR ATTAINING PEACE BUT FIND MANY INDICATIONS THIS
DESIRE IS NOT SHARED BY ISRAEL. END SUMMARY.

2. ALTHOUGH PRES. ASSAD CAREFULLY AVOIDED ANY MENTION OF
WAR OPTION IN HIS JUNE 14 PRESS CONFERENCE WITH DANISH
JOURNALISTS, A NUMBER OF ARTICLES HAVE APPEARED IN SYRIAN
PRESS OVER PAST TEN DAYS ANALYZING OPTION OF HOSTILITIES

WITH ISRAEL. COLUMNS GENERALLY STRIKE THEME THAT, IN AFTER-MATH OF LIKUD PLURALITY, CONTINUED PURSUIT OF PEACE BY SYRIANS CAN ONLY BE CREDIBLE IF ACCOMPANIED BY STRENGTHENED MILITARY OPTION. FOR EXAMPLE, AMID KHULI WROTE IN AL-BAATH THAT, "WHEN WE TALK ABOUT THE PROSPECTS OF WAR, WE DO THIS SO THAT NOBODY WILL BELIEVE PEACE IS THE ONLY SOLUTION EXPECTED BY THE ARABS, AND ESPECIALLY SO THAT NO ONE WILL YIELD TO THE ILLUSION THAT PEACE IS EASY TO ATTAIN. RIGHT FROM THE OUTSET, SYRIA HAS BEEN AWARE OF THE DIFFICULTY, EVEN THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF PEACE WITH ISRAEL, AND HAS BEEN PREPARING ITSELF FOR THE OBVIOUS ALTERNATIVE, SINCE IT CANNOT UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES CONCEDE ONE INCH OF ITS TERRITORY OR IGNORE THE RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIANS. THE ENEMY WILL ALWAYS FIND THE SYRIAN ARMY IN A MAXIMUM DEGREE OF READINESS." ANOTHER COLUMNIST NOTED THAT, WHILE SYRIA WOULD "CONTINUE ITS ACTIVE POLITICAL DRIVE FOR THE ACHIEVEMENT OF JUST PEACE," THE ARABS "KNOW THE WAY TO ANOTHER OCTOBER." A THIRD WRITER ASSERTED THAT "PEACE IS OUR HOPE, BUT BETWEEN HOPE AND ITS ACHIEVEMENT IS A LONG AND ARDUOUS DISTANCE WHICH REQUIRES ALL ARABS WISHING PEACE TO BE PREPARED FOR ALL EVENTUALITIES."

3. WE HAVE NOTED SOME AMBIVALENCE IN THE PRESS AS WRITERS TRY TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN POLICY DIRECTIONS OF BEGIN GOVT AND POSTURES OF CURRENT ALIGNMENT LEADERSHIP. ACCORDING TO YARUB AL-SAYYID, "BEGIN HAS DECLARED ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION THAT THE NEW GOVT WILL NOT BE COMMITTED TO ANY OBLIGATIONS SIGNED BY FORMER GOVERNMENTS." A LATER NEWS ARTICLE CITED ISRAELI PRESS REPORT THAT "TERRORIST LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BEGIN AFFIRMED TO PRES. CARTER HE IS PREPARED TO ATTEND THE GENEVA MEPC ON THE BASIS OF UNSC RES. 242 AND 338, AND THAT HE IS PREPARED TO MAKE CONCESSIONS IN SINAI AND THE GOLAN, BUT NOT ON THE WEST BANK." OTHERS FIND LITTLE EVIDENCE TO JUSTIFY SERIOUS EFFORTS AT DISTINGUISHING AMONG ISRAELI LEADERS. MUHAMMAD MANSUR CLAIMED THAT, "ALL SIGNS INDICATE THAT PROSPECTS FOR WAR IN THE ME HAVE BECOME CLOSER THAN PROSPECTS FOR PEACE. THE REAL REASON IS NOT THE COMING TO POWER OF THE LIKUD BLOC AND BEGIN'S AGGRESSIVE EXPANSIONIST STATEMENTS, BUT RATHER THAT IN ISRAEL THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS HARD-LINERS OR OTHERWISE. THEY ARE ALL AGGRESSORS, EXPANSIONISTS AND INVADERS. STILL, THE TAKEOVER OF BEGIN, WHO IS A FIRST-CLASS INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST, HAS INCREASED THE PESSIMISM OF OBSERVERS," AMID KHULI ASSERTED THAT THE BEGIN PHASE IS BUT THE CLIMAX OF "TRADITIONAL ZIONIST EXPANSIONIST POLICY," AND OPINED THAT CONSEQUENTLY "THE BATTLES OF PEACE AND OF WAR WILL BECOME MORE CLOSELY INTERCONNECTED. THE MORE THE ENEMY FEELS THAT THE ARABS ARE CAPABLE OF DETERRING THE OPTION OF WAR, THE MORE IT INCLINES

TOWARD PEACE AS THE ONLY COURSE." ABD AL-ILAH AL-MALLAH'S COLUMN NOTED THAT SINCE LIKUD ELECTORAL SUCCESS, "THE REGION HAS AGAIN STARTED MOVING TOWARD CONFRONTATION. THE AREA IS NO CLOSER TO SOLUTION THAN IT WAS TEN, TWENTY OR THIRTY YEARS AGO. ALL REASONS CALLING FOR SKEPTICISM ARE THERE. WE ARE NEITHER CLOSER NOR FARTHER".

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4. SOME COLUMNISTS HAVE EXPLORED THE IMPLICATIONS OF ISRAELI DEVELOPMENTS ON ARAB-U.S.-ISRAELI RELATIONS. AL-MALLAH ASSERTED ISRAELIS HAVE NOT CEASED STATING THAT THEY ARE NOT COMMITTED TO US CONCEPTIONS OF PEACE, LATEST OF WHICH HE NOTED ARE BECOMING MORE CLEAR, PARTICULARLY PRES. CARTER'S STATEMENTS ABOUT A PALESTINIAN HOMELAND. THIS, HE CLAIMED, "CANCELS THE MEANING OF THE CURRENT ARAB-AMERICAN DIALOGUE." MANSUR, HOWEVER, DERIVED SOME SATISFACTION THAT BEGIN'S "DEFIANCE" OF US AND INTERNATIONAL PUBLIC OPINION MAKING IT CLEAR THAT ISRAEL, NOT ARABS, CREATING NEW TENSIONS. HE SAID US MEDIA HAVE BEEN REITERATING THAT OMENS OF WAR ARE APPARENT. AL-THAWRA EDITOR ALI SULAYMAN ASSERTED

THAT "THE SPECTER OF WAR IS COMING CLOSER," AND ADDED
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THAT PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF ME CONFLICT "DEPENDENT ON
DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN ISRAEL AND THE US."

5. TO EMPHASIZE THAT NOT ONLY THE CONFRONTATION STATES
BUT ALL ARABS FACE DANGERS OF NEW FIGHTING WITH ISRAELI,
JIBRAN KURIYAH WROTE, "THE PERIL OF ZIONIST AGGRESSION IS
NOT CONFINED TO THE PALESTINIANS AND THE ARAB STATES
BORDERING PALESTINE, BUT EXTENDS TO ALL ARAB STATES WHAT-
EVER THEIR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SYSTEMS. ARAB OIL SOURCES
ARE NOT SAFE FROM ZIONIST AMBITIONS. TWO RECENT CATASTROPHES
WHICH OCCURRED IN A NATURAL GAS PROCESSING PLANT AND IN
AN OIL WELL IN TWO ARAB OIL-PRODUCING COUNTRIES PROVIDE AN
IDEA OF WHAT THE ENEMY COULD RESORT TO AGAINST ARAB
COUNTRIES WHICH ARE REMOTE FROM LINES OF CONFRONTATION."
ANOTHER COLUMNIST CALLED UPON ARABS TO "MOBILIZE THEIR
FORCES, ENERGIES, WEALTH AND INFLUENCE AND TO RISE ABOVE
MARGINAL PREOCCUPATIONS." KAMAL TUFFAHA WROTE THAT,
WITH ME SITUATION "SWIFTLY PROCEEDING TOWARD ERUPTION."
ARABS MUST PREPARE TO USE OIL WEAPON. HE ALSO CALLED
UPON ARABS TO INTENSIFY THEIR INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMATIC
EFFORTS.

6. AT LEAST ONE COLUMNIST BELIEVES THAT ISRAELI HL ALREADY
DETERMINED TO PURSUE THE MILITARY OPTION. AL-MALLAH, IN
COLUMN ENTITLED "A MILITARY OPTION -- AN ISRAELI OPTION,"
WROTE THAT "AFTER AN INTERVAL OF RELAXATION IN
EXPECTATION OF THE MIRACLE OF A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT, GLOOMY
CLOUDS OF THE MILITARY OPTION HAVE BEGUN GATHERING ON THE
HORIZON. STATEMENTS ISSUED FROM THE OTHER SIDE BRING
AN OMEN OF WAR, WHICH IS VERY, VERY DANCEROUS THIS
TIME. THE OTHER SIDE IS NOW EARNEST ABOUT TRYING TO
CREATE NEW CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WOULD SABOTAGE RESULTS
OF THE ARAB POLITICAL DRIVE
WHICH BEGAN IN THE WAKE OF
THE OCTOBER WAR. IT APPEARS THAT THE ISRAELI MILITARY
ESTABLISHMENT HAS CONCLUDED ITS PREPARATIONS TO DEAL A
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SUDDEN AND INDIRECT BLOW. IT ALSO APPEARS THAT THE
LOCATION OF THE BLOW HAS BEEN DETERMINED, AND
THAT THERE ONLY REMAINS THE POLITICAL DECISION, WHICH IS
SUBJECT TO FORMATION OF A COALITION GOVERNMENT." HE
CONCLUDED THAT THE SITUATION TODAY WAS SIMILAR TO EVE OF

1967 WAR, WHEN ISRAEL LAUNCHED SIX DAY WAR AFTER GOVERNMENT FORMED WITH PARTICIPATION OF BEGIN AND DAYAN.

7. SYRIAN COLUMNISTS HAVE MADE SOME EFFORT TO REITERATE THEIR VIEW THAT ISRAEL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR REEMERGENCE OF MILITARY OPTION. KURIYAH ARTICULATED THIS VIEW DIRECTLY IN A RECENT TISHRIIN COLUMN: "IT IS THE ISRAELI SIDE ALONE WHICH HAS RAISED THE MILITARY OPTION ONCE AGAIN IN THE AREA. THERE IS NOT ONE SINGLE PROOF THAT IT WAS THE ARABS WHO APPROACHED MILITARY ESCALATION OR THAT IT WAS THEM WHO PUT FORWARD THE MILITARY OPTION. THE ARABS HAVE INDICATED A REAL DESIRE FOR JUST AND LASTING PEACE."

8. ONE OF THE AL-BAATH COLUMNISTS RECENTLY TOLD EMBOFF THAT THIS LINE OF MEDIA COMMENTARY REFLECTS SOME SERIOUS CONCERNS HELD BY MANY SYRIANS, AND IS NOT SOLELY FOR PROPAGANDA PURPOSES. IN DISCUSSING POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE ARAB-ISRAELI WAR, IT BECAME CLEAR THAT HE FELT SYRIAN ARMY COULD WITHSTAND ISRAELI ATTACKS UNTIL LATTER RAN LOW ON SUPPLIES. HIS SECOND ASSUMPTION WAS THAT US WOULD NOT MOUNT MASSIVE EFFORT TO RESUPPLY ISRAEL.

9. COMMENT: SYRIAN COLUMNISTS DURING PAST MONTHS HAVE DEVOTED CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION TO EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE. FOLLOWING ISRAELI ELECTIONS, THEY HAVE SOUGHT TO BALANCE THEIR COVERAGE BY ANALYZING RAMIFICATIONS OF WAR OPTION WHILE STILL PROFESSING SYRIAN INTEREST IN REACHING SETTLEMENT BY PEACEFUL MEANS. THEIR APPEALS FOR INCREASED ARAB SOLIDARITY AND FOR ASSISTANCE FROM OIL-PRODUCING STATES TO CONFRONTATION STATES ARE THEMES WHICH SARG HAS REGULARLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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Message Attributes

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